[On German Clockmakers]

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F. Donovan

Thomaston, Conn.

December 11, 1938 Yankee Clock- maker of Thomas ton

ON GERMAN CLOCKMAKERS

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Mr. Davis had an interesting sidelight on the German clockmakers -- the first sour note in the paen paean of praise for these old craftsmen.

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“They were goo good ” said he; “but they were tinkers. They did everything the hard way and sometimes they wouldn't take advantage of innovations, though they would have saved them time and money. If they had to have a tool, for instance, they'd likely as not make it out of wood, and fuss around for hours with it, when they could have ordered the same thing from the toolroom, and had an expert job done in a fraction of the same time.

“You'd be surprised how cheap they worked, too. It's always been my opinion that they hired so many of them because they got 'em for next to nothing. I remember an old fellow named Hoffman, who used to make verges -- that was a job that called for skill and should have been fairly well paid.

“About the time war broke out in Europe, Hoffman came to the superintendent, who was a pretty good friend of mine and asked for a raise. The superintendent gave him a raise of 25 cents a day, which was a pretty good increase. But be told me -- and I was certainly surprised -- that Hoffman had only been getting two dollars a day.

2

“They learned their trades mostly in homes, as some of them may have told you. And speaking of homework for the factories there used to be plenty of that done around here in the old days.

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“When I was a kid a bunch of us were out walking in the woods, and we came upon an old, deserted, tumbled down house. Boy-like, we had to investigate. In one of the rooms we found small wooden boxes, piled on one another, and when we had pried some of them open we found them filled with wooden wheels of various sizes for clock movements. Apparently that whole family had been engaaed engaged in turning out those wheels -- I think they made them from laurel, which is nearly as hard as boxwood.

“I learned knife-making at home, from my old man, but I didn't work at it. I got a job in the metal case division in the Clock shop, and I worked there most of my life, except when I went to Trenton for a while to work.

“I used to be foreman of the dial room and I remember that for many years I had over my desk a clock with a hand-painted dial. I don't know when it was made, but evidently they did that sort of thing at one time. It wasn't artistic, by any means, but it was ornate -- a painstaking piece of work. There were flowered decorations all around the dial and even the numerals had been painted on. The dial was wood, and as thick as the palm of your hand.

“They had a sun-dial once, just outside the Marine shop, that used to be consulted for absolutely correct time. Afterwards they received the time by [teletram?] telegram every day from the Greenwich observatory, and then they made one of those astronomical clocks and used that as a master clock. It was jeweled at every possible place and must have cost a small fortune.

3

“And don't let anyone tell you that weather doesn't affect clocks. When I worked for a while in the watch division I can remember them putting watches in a refrigerator and adjusting them afterwards to allow for extreme cold.

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E. R Kaiser, employed by the company for more than 40 years. Formerly superintendent, now first selectman of the town. German parentage. Residence High Street.

“If you're going to write anything about Aaron Thomas, for God's sake give him credit for being a civic-minded, charitable man. Why that very clock” pointing to a massive, old fashioned mahogany wall clock with pendulum movement that hangs upon the wall in his office, “that very clock was given to the town by Aaron Thomas when he became first selectman. And that isn't all he did by a long shot.

“During the panic of 1887 he gave all his farm produce -- and it was plenty -- to the needy. He had acres and acres of land, with half dozen hands working steady under an overseer. He had prize cattle and horses.

“He was always doing things for the town and for the church -- he belonged to the Congregational Church -- but half of them were never heard of and he got no credit -- not that he ever cared. He donated land for the two Swedish churches here I believe, though I'm not certain.

4

[“Sure weather affects clocks that's pretty generally known. The balance movements will vary more than the pendulum though. We made the finest railroad movement in the country over at the old Marine shop, and it was adjusted to heat and cold.”?] Insert in

A picture of Aaron Thomas as a sort of benevolent despot, irascible, high tempered, with almost feudal power over his employees, and at same time democratic and unaffected to an extraordinary degrees takes form from conversations with those who knew him. The last of the Thomases to actively conduct the business in his native community, his name is mentioned by these, his old employees, so often not only because he was their contemporary, but because he was indubitably a truly remarkable character. Here's more

about him, gleaned from James Wilson, Scotch, who worked nearly 45 years for the company. He lives on Judson St. # “ The shops shut down tight for three months during the panic of 1887. People were up against it because there wasn't much in the way of organized relief in those days. But them that lived in the company houses didn't have to pay their rent. That was Aaron Thomas' doings. They owned a good number of houses then. They owned the Cotton row, and the Yellow row over on Railroad and Chapel streets, and the row on Clay street and a lot more. start here[?] “ Walter Thomas was superintendent of the case shop, I think, when I came to work here, and Edson Thomas was superintendent of the tower clock department. Edson also ran the old brick yard up off Crow Hill as a sidelines but I don't think it was ever very profitable. 5 “ In those days they had about 1,000 to 1,200 hands throughout the three plants, and if I remember rightly they had about eight clerks -- that was their whole office force. They tell me now they have sixty-eight office workers. And I misdoubt they can count 300 hands. “ Dud Bradstreet used to be vice-president when I went to work in 1886. He took care of most of the office work, they said, and you wouldn't see him walk through the plant more than twice a year. He'd always speak nicely to everybody though. Old Aaron Thomas, I used to see him walking by my house every Sunday with old Mr. Miner, who used to be handy man over in the Movement shop. They'd go out in the woods for a stroll, every Sunday morning. Would you see any of them doing that today? You would not.

“Woodruff was a different type. I mean William T. Woodruff the president after Aaron. He came through the stock room where I was working one day, and he was looking for trouble. But I had everything arranged in good order. He couldn't find anything to complain about, so after he'd looked around for about five minutes, he said: “Who takes care of this place?” I said: “I do.” end #

“I thought so, says he, very sarcastic, and walks away.”

“But for all he was so high and mighty I remember when his father, old Doc Woodruff, kept cows and pigs and chickens in the barn in back of that fine big house of theirs.” 6 Moses

Ariel , Grand Street, Yankee. Employed for 40 years by Seth Thomas Clock Co.; retired eight years ago.

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“Well young man I don't know that I can help you much. I think perhaps some of the old German clockmakers would be better informed. I worked in the tool room and when I first went to work here they were making the watches.

“I enjoyed the work, and I wouldn't have swapped it for the best watch-making job in the plant. “ I worked on tools for the watch work and it was highly interesting. They gave us all the time we wanted to do it and all they asked was that the final job be a good one. start here “ And it was, usually. You had to be an inventor of sorts and you had to have a little native ingenuity. We didn't have any figures or blueprints to go by. “ They used to come and explain what was needed and tell us to go to work on it and take our time, but to do the job right. That was typical of the whole plant in those days. There wasn't any of this constant push, push, push! for production. Most everybody was on day work, at a comfortable rate of pay, and the idea was to make good clocks. “ No matter what the operation, as a rule, a man tool took considerable pride in doing his work and he wouldn't let it leave his hands until it was done to the best of his ability. The bosses were aware of this attitude and encouraged it and that's the way Seth Thomas clocks got a world-wide reputation for precision and durability. “ I've got two of the old reliable models right here in the house and they've both been running for I don't know how many years. They'll be ticking away, I presume likely, long after I've stopped ticking myself. “ 7 [(Mr. Ariel arose to call my attention to an old fashioned,square-faced pendulum clock, the dial discolored with age. He opened the lower door of the case to disclose a pasted, tattered label bearing the legend “Seth Thomas Clocks, Plymouth Hollow, U.S.A.Warranted Good.”)?]

“ You can see the date on there if you look real close. It's 1852. And this towns as you can see, wasn't Thomaston then, it was Plymouth Hollow. That clock was given to me

by Mrs. Newell Webster, who was a niece of Aaron Thomas. “ Yessir,, they made clocks when they made that model. I guess it was just about that time, or maybe [10?] years or so later, that they began to import the German clockmakers, and though you'll find some to disagree with you, to my mind they were the best the industry ever saw. “ In Germany clockmaking was a real trade, almost you might say, a profession. Before they could call themselves clockmakers, they had to be able to assemble a clock from the mainspring out. They spent specified periods of time on each operation and by the time they were through they knew the business. “ Of course the old Yankee clockmakers were good, there's no denying that, but they were specialists, you might say. That is, they learned one particular operation and sometimes spent a lifetime at it. Of course there were many who could put a clock together too, and make it go, but I wouldn't class'em with the Germans. “ These new Dutchmen that have been coming over here since the war aren't so good, I understand, but then the whole place seems to have slipped badly in recent years. I think it's a case of too much piecework.

8

“I remember the last few years I worked there, they'd got to speeding things up. I used to watch them drilling plates for instance. They'd never bother to get'em level first, and as a result the whole train of the clock would be off. The holes wouldn't be in the right places, the pinions would be out of line and they'd stick. What happened then? Why [the pinions'd stick and?] half the movements would be stoppers. “ Well they've let most of the old clockmakers go and I think they've made a mistake. And what's more I told Mason T. Adams so one time he came up here to see me. “ [(The late Mason T. Adams was vice president and general ma Seth Thomas Clock Co. before the merger with General Times Instruments. The consolidation took place shortly after his death.)?] “I told him, I said, “Mr. Adams I said, “ I should think these men would still be of value to the company. Even if they're slowing up as workers, doesn't their experience count for anything? They ought to prove good teachers at any rates. ’” ”

“And he said: ‘I'm inclined to agree with you , and if I had my way, maybe something might be done about it. [/But?] you know I'm not the whole works down there. ’” ” “ My grandson works for them now, and every once in a while I hear him stewing. That office force they have now, the way I hear, they've got one man in the office for every bench worker in the shop. They've got prices so low, I'm told, a man can't no more'n take the work out of one box and throw it into another to make his day rate, let alone put in the proper time on it. end end

9

“I heard the young fellow tell about a lad he knows, wheel truer, working under those conditions. He said the lad didn't make any attempt to get the work done right. Just spun the wheels a couple of times and threw'em into a box, said he know they'd wobble but what the hell did he care, the work was coming so bad it was all he could do to make his day rate. [?]

“You talk about clockmaker's profanity young fella, and if there's any special brand it ought to be ripe about now. I'd suggest that you talk to some of the young fellows down there.”

* * * * * * Joseph Reichenbach, German: employed by Seth Thomas Co. for 49 years. High Street, Thomaston.

“So you've talked to Mr. Albecker, have you? Well, I didn't serve my time in the same section, but pretty close by -- about 40 miles away. It's true, what he says, you didn't get any pay. And not only that, but you were ‘bound’ to the clockmaker. If you ran away, your people were responsible and had to pay for you. begin Reichenbach with [a?] from p. 11. “ I had a close friend who had gone to Scotland, and after I'd learned my trade he wrote me to join him there. So I did. I went to work for the Singer Sewing Machine Company. No, clockmaking wasn't any use to me there, but the money was good. They paid a pound a week, which was considered a good salary in those days. But I wanted to come to America and work at my trade. 10 “ Friends had written me about clock making in Connecticut, so

I eventually landed in Thomaston. But when I got here I couldn't get into the clock shop. I had to take a job in the Eagle Lock Company in Terryville and work there six months before there was an opening here. insert [b?] from p. [11?] “ That was in 1881. I finally got a job with Old Man Scheebel, who had a contract truing and staking out wheels. Those contractors hated to give you a decent salary, though. [Yes?], there was a lot it contracting in those days -- there was Heintzman, who had the contract for truing balances, and Saul who did the drilling and Childs, who drilled pinions and Lehmann, who had the contract for turning work. They stopped giving contracts during the war, I think. /? “ Then I worked as at model-making. For years old Mr. Ebner and me did it all. That was high grade work. We made some of the finest precision movements the company ever put out. We made, for example, three astronomical clocks for observatories. One went to Peru; one went to Yale University and one to some other university, I believe it was Catholic University in Washington. “ It took two or three months for one of these jobs. Everything, every wheel and pinion, had to be filed out by hand. They had to be perfect timekeepers, and they were tested over and over again for defects before they left our hands. They're used to make delicate astronomical observations. We made one later for Honolulu, and one was sent to a big jewelry store in Seattle, where they displayed it for advertising purposes. 11 [“I don't subscribe to the belief that weather affects the movements. There may be a difference, but it is slight. But I know that?] weight clocks are the best timekeepers. The astronomical clocks were all made with weights. No # “ Assembling and escaping, I should say, were the most difficult operations in clockmaking. Of course, these days the work is all divided -- and each man does something different -- but as I've told you and Albecker has told you -- when we learned the trade we had to assemble the entire movement.

[“ There were big factories in Gutenberg, where I learned the business, but there wasn't much machinery in use. All the parts were made by hand -- about the only thing in the way of machinery they used was a wheel cutter. But some of that hand work was pretty bad stuff, no matter what you hear to the contrary, and there are certain things they can make better with machinery, no doubt about it. [a?] insert on p 9

“In Germany in those days, they sent most of their clocks to England and Russia and few, if any, to America. But this country exported plenty. There were two big wholesale places in Glasgow, for instance, one where they sold Winged clocks and another where they sold Seth Thomas and New Haven clocks.?]

[“There were many English clockmakers in Thomaston here when I first came, but only a few Swiss. There are no Swiss clockmakers here now, and I remember only one or two in my time.?] [b?] - insert on page 10

12

I had the good fortune today to come upon three of the old timers in one of their favorite hangouts -- the Thomaston fire department headquarters. They were George Richmond (previously interviewed), William Armstrong who worked for Seth Thomas Clock Co. as a young man and Henry Odenwald, who also worked at the plant off and on during the course of his residence in Thomaston, alternating with work as a barber. Odenwald is German , and Armstrong of Scotch parentage.

“Looking for more stories about Aaron, are you?” began Mr. Richmond. “These fellows can probably tell you some.” (But he kept right on talking without giving his cronies a chance to interrupt.) “Aaron used to own most of this land around here. Had two colored servants running it for him -- only colored family in town -- Finn Mix and his wife. Their son Warren Mix lives down in Waterbury to this day.

“Aaron drove his horses into that old barn on Clay street at eleven o'clock on the dot every day. He was as methodical as they come, Then at five minutes to twelve every day he'd be in his office to hear any complaints the help wanted to make. He was fair and square too. If you had a legitimate complaint you'd get satisfaction every time. He was a stern man, but honest and fair.

Mr. Armstrong: “Yes, that's the God's truth. When we first came to this country my mother got a job at the Case shop. She'd only worked there a few months when times began to get bad, and Ed Thomas (that was old Aaron's son) he laid her off. Said if anybody 13 had to go it would be some of those ‘damn foreigners’. Aaron came to our house when he heard about it, and asked her if she needed a job. She said she did, and he gave her a job doing housework. Then when times picked up he got her back in the factory.”

Mr. Odenwald: “People used to kind of look up to him, too. I remember when he was selectman and I had the barber shop in the town hall building, he came to me one night and he says: ‘Henry, go downstairs and see what you can dow do with “Pink” Wilson. He's roaring drunk and he's just chased everybody out of the post office.”

“So I went down -- Pink and me always got along good together -- and I says to him ‘Now look here, Pink, the old man is upstairs and he's worried about you, afraid you're going to get into trouble.’

“‘Did he send you down after [/Me]?’ Pink says.

“Yes, I says, he did.”

“‘All right, Henry’ says Pink, ‘I'll go home’ And home he went.

Mr. Richmond: “I don't know if Aaron was selectman the time they had the big row over the church property or not, but I know he was on the losin' side for once -- because I remember hearin' him argue at the meeting.”

“The town wanted the church people to take down their spire when they built this here fire house, because it planned to place this building about twenty feet farther down the street. You know the cemetery was here then, right where the town hall is and the fire house is now.

“So them that was arguin' for the town claimed the church spire stood on town property. Randall T. Andrews -- him that used to own the furniture store -- he was a church trustee, and he says: ‘Gentlemen, I think you're going ahead with this without proper authority. Suppose you postpone action until a week from tonight and I may have some interesting figures here.

“At the next meeting Andrews got up -- he'd been to Hartford looking up law -- and looking up old land records -- and he says: ‘Gentlemen, it’s generally agreed isn't it, that the cemetery is church property?

“Nobody disagreed with him, so he went on: ‘I find by consulting old records that the cemetery boundaries extend not only to the church, but right around to the rear of my store.’ (His store was south of the church.) So the church people won out.’

* * * * *

Bartholomew Albecker, German: employed by Seth Thomas Clock Co. for >48 years.

Mr. Albecker is one of the old-time German clockmakers to whom I have referred in previous reports. He knows the trade from beginning to end -- learned it through strict and thorough apprenticeship -- and is undoubtedly one of the finest clockmakers in this clockmaking community. Though he has been in this country and in Thomaston 15 [since he was nineteen years old, he says there were German clockmakers here before him, many of them established for years. But most of them, he believes emigrated during the period immediately following the close of the Civil War and extending through the nineties.?] [?] “ There were old Germans here when I came . “ he said. “There was old man Kaiser, father of the presant present first selectman; and there was Mr. Lehmann and Hertzmann and Scheebel, who were what they called contractor , insert on p 16 “Contractors? Why they specialists in some particular line of work. They worked at the

company's plants and used the company tools and the like, but they took the work under contract and hired their own help. [Mr. Beardslee had a contract of some kind -- I believe he made the screws -- they do that with automatic machines now. Mr. Saum, that was Charlie Saum's father, he had the contract for the lock work. They haven't given contracts for years.?] start here “ I served an apprenticeship for three years after I left school in Germany. That It was in a small factory in the Black Forest [/Region?]. Then I went to work in Lenzkirch, which is a kind of clock-making center over there, where they make all the high grade clocks.

The first two-and-a-half years of my apprenticeship I didn't get a cent of money and for the last six months I got paid -- but damned damn little. When I was through with it and had been working a little while I was 19 years old. I left because of the military business -- the conscription -- not that I was so anxious to dodge service -- but sometimes they didn't get around to calling you until you were 23 or 24 years old and at that age a young man doesn't want to waste three years in the army. 16 “ Well, I came to New York, all by muself myself , couldn't speak a word of English. And I spent a week down there looking around. I had an uncle there and he gave me the addresses of some of the clock manufacturing companies' branch offices. I went to the Seth Thomas office and there was a fellow there who spoke German. I had my credentials and he could see right away that I knew the business, so he told me to go to Thomaston. He gave me letters, and I got train directions and came on here.

“The first man I saw when I arrived at the company's main office was Aaron Thomas, who was president then. He began to talk to me, after he'd read my letters, but of course I couldn't understand a word he said. But he made me understand what he wanted after his own fashion.

“He pulled out his watch and pointed to it. It was just one o'clock -- time to go to work -- and though it was Saturday that's just what that old fellow wanted me to do. I shook my head no. I wasn't going to go to work for half a day.

“The first man I met after I left the office apparently knew [aI?] was a greenhorn, for he led me to the shop of Jacob Hentz, the barber, and from then on I got along fine, for Jacob was German and I had someone to talk to. insert from p 15 [?] [“I can't tell you much about Aaron Thomas, because he retired shortly after I went to work for the company and William T. Woodruff became president. There isn't a great deal I can tell you about him either. He was a proud, aristocratic type, not the kind who would mingle with the workers.?] 17 “ I went to work on the old Nutmeg alarms and the number ten movements; and then I was transferred upstairs where the marine clocks were made and worked on the Locomotive -- [yes?] that was a company name but I don't know why it was called that -- then I went to work on regulators.

“In [1936?] I went to work at the Waterbury Clock shop but after two years they called me back to Seth Thomas, and I was glad to go. The Waterbury clock company was run the way they run factories all over today -- push the help and cut prices -- but there was none of that in Seth Thomas. We had more freedom than the average workers. 1896 ? end [“There were a few Swiss clockmakers here when I first went to work, but none of them are left now, and the only one whose name I can recall at the moment was Herner -- he's been gone for years. “Ear timing? The worker holds the clock against his ear and checks it with a master clock on his bench. The idea is to make the balance speed the same as that of the master clock. They don't do it at Seth Thomas any more because it can be done only with cheap movements that do not require fine adjusting. And they've stopped making such movements.?]

“They used to have special ‘coops’ for the ear-timer because the noise of other workers would take his mind off what he was doing and the job requires absolute concentration. It was something like metronome work. Metronomes are used by students of music to aid them in timing. I worked on them for years and was in charge of the room where they were made.

“And I found that just as in ear-timing the worker had to have an ‘ear’ for the work, and some who had been successful in other jobs were failures at it. I couldn't break in girls on the work because they couldn't concentrate enough. Older, settled men, made the best bets.”

“It's true that weather affects clocks, and I suppose it is due to chemical changes in the metal as the result of temperature. I have four or five in the house and during the summer they all keep time together, but in cooler weather no two of them are alike. So I suppose you could say truthfully that clocks run better in the summer than they do in winter.”

I find from my notes that I neglected to mention in my previous report Arthur Botsford's unique method of jogging his memory. Mr. Botsford has preserved a “Time book” 70 or more years old, which he said he snatched from a load of ancient records which were being consigned to the fire by a company janitor.

This journal was a day book, used in lieu of other timekeeping methods by the concern. In it, each employee entered his name and the time spent at his work at the end of each day, subject, of course to the approval of the foreman. Mr. Botsford's first day of service with the company was recorded and he was able, by looking at the entries and significant gaps, to trace events in the lives of fellow employees.”

“Look here,” he said, pointing to a name -- “That shows me the exact date Mr. Laughlin's boy died of typhoid fever. You see, he worked up till Wednesday -- the rest of the days are blank after his name. Here's the last day we were permitted to work 11 hours. Then the new law went into effect. And here is the daisy of them all.”

He pointed to a blank sheet, dated some time in April 1873. “All gone -- young and old,' it read in faded ink. “That meant that P. T. Barnum was playing in Waterbury,” said Mr. Botsford.

I believe Mr. Albecker's description of ear timing adequately covers the subject. I regret that you gained the impression that “ear-timers all drink,” for many do not. There are none employed at Seth Thomas now, but there are several living here who work at Ingraham's and all are sober, reliable men. There are none employed at Seth Thomas now, but there are several living here who work at Ingraham's and all are sober, reliable men. There have been instances of hard drinking among ear timers, I gather from conversations with the older men, and this led to the belief that there was something about the work which led to addiction to liquor. It is, as Mr. Alberker said, highly nervous work, and the tension which accompanies it may lead some of the workers to seek relief -- a temporary letdown in an alcoholic spree after their working hours. 20 BOTSFORD ON MIGRATION

(Francis Donovan, Thomaston; December 15, 1938).

ART BOTSFORD: -- “Names have always kind of interested me. There was a lot of discussion the time they named Thomaston. Some wanted to call it Thomas Town; and some wanted to call it Thomas Ton -- and the last party won out. They had a bit open meetings and there was quite a lot of arguin' one way and the other.

“Funny how names leave their impression on places and how people long dead sometimes live forever, you might say, or their names live on, rather, in some town or city.

“My mother's folks was Scrantons -- her name was Abbott, but the Scrantons were her folks way back. They wandered all over the country I guess. Some of them settled down around Pennsylvania, and there's a city there now you've heard of -- Scranton.

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“You take a map sometime, and look at the state of New Hampshire, and you'll find the names of more than twenty Connecticut towns and cities. Years ago, when this state began to get more thickly populated, people got discouraged trying to make a living here -- they had big families then and it was hard going -- they just up and left the state in big bunches. A lot of them settled up New Hampshire way, and of course it was perfectly natural for them to name a new town or village after the one they'd left.

21

“It's a fine thing for a community to be named after some outstanding man who put something in to the building of it. That's why I'm strong for surnames. It would be a good thing if more people were given first names after other branches of the family -- I often wished I had -- preserves the old family names.

“Of course there's some that favor saints names or Biblical names, and that's all right too, but if I had my choice I'd name youngsters with family names.

“There wasn't any question about what they'd call this town that was after they'd broke away from Plymouth you know -- nobody argued when the suggestion came up that they name it after the Thomas family. The only discussion was like I said -- whether it'd be ThomasTon or ThomasTown. That was in 1875, and before that it was Plymouth Hollow.

“Plymouth, I suppose got its name from the original Plymouth up in Massachusetts. This was all once the parish of Northbury.

“I like to see things commemorated in other ways, too. I often thought -- though I never said anything about it -- that when they was buildin' that tower down on the main building of the plant, they could just as easy have made it into the likeness of an old Seth Thomas grandfather clock. They could have painted the pendulum on the glass, and it would have attracted attention better than a lot of advertisements. [??]

Consulting August Wehrle, who has something of a reputation locally as a historian of town affairs, I was given an insight into 22 the social life of the community thirty to fifty years ago by means of a number of newspaper clippings describing social events. Clockmakers of that particular period were inveterate patrons during the winter season of “fairs,” staged by various social and fraternal organizations -- The Criterion club -- the Fire Department the Eastern Star -- an amateur theatrical group -- the Thomaston Minstrel club. All of these events were hold at the Opera House -- an auditorium in the town hall building -- and all apparently were a “great success.”

They were held from one to three nights each, with various forms of entertainment each evenings climaxed on Saturday night usually, by a pretentious stage show of some sort -- sometimes a grand march thrown in for good measure. Following the show the moveable seats were stored away, and in booths which lined the auditorium on both sides, members of the organization sponsoring the event hawked merchandise and special prizes to be won on the “wheels.”

One of the most active and popular of the old organizations, comprised very largely of employes of the clock company, was the Thomaston Minstrel Club.

According to a clipping from the local paper: “The Club was one of the most popular entertainment features in Thomaston and surrounding towns. Organized in 1902, the first show presented was in Thomaston Opera House Jan. 25, 1903, for the benefit of the T.A.B. society of St. Thomas' church. Michael Keegan, now of Boston, was manager and producer, and the later late Frank T. Bidwell, a musician of great ability, was the director and pianist.

23

“The minstrel proved a great hit and from then on, they were in constant demand. For a number of years the club was called upon to open practically all the fairs and bazaars in this and neighboring communities, and always played to capacity houses.

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“The last public appearance of the minstrels was in 1929, when by popular request, they staged an old-time show in the Opera House. Once again, the house was packed, and the S.R.O. sign was hoisted long before the curtain arose. The ovation received by the few older members provied proved that they had lost none of their former appeal. Many in the audience had come from distant points to witness the performance. Assisting the few old timers that night were Miss Lois Biggs, daughter of Harry Biggs, one of the original members, and Harold, Francis and Joseph Conway, three sons of former members. These four continue as members of the club.

“The closest of friendships exist between the few remaining charter members, and frequently they unite with their families and friends for a reunion. At these gatherings the old songs are sung and those fortunate enough to attend claim that the club members sing as delightfully now, to the accompaniment of Arthur Henderson, present pianist, as they did 34 years ago.”